Indiana State Department of Health
Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Food Poisoning

What is food poisoning?

Food poisoning is caused by toxins (poisons) made by certain kinds of bacteria that have grown in food because the food did not reach proper temperatures while cooking or during the holding period. Most outbreaks happen in places where there isn't proper cooling and refrigeration.

What are the symptoms of food poisoning?

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Cramps
- Weakness

Symptoms can happen quickly and violently. Fever is NOT a normal symptom of food poisoning. Dehydration may result from lots of vomiting and diarrhea, but major complications or death is very rare.

How is food poisoning spread?

Foods normally become contaminated through unwashed hands or from environmental sources. Food that is not cooked properly or not stored at proper temperatures can allow bacteria to grow and produce toxins in the food. Food poisoning is NOT spread from person to person.

Who is at risk for getting food poisoning?

Anyone can become ill, but young children, older adults, pregnant women, and immune suppressed individuals (such as patients on cancer drugs and with organ transplants) are more likely to get sick.

How do I know if I have food poisoning?

Anyone having diarrhea for more than 24 hours should see a doctor. The illness can be diagnosed by symptoms and fast onset, but your health care provider may order tests to rule out other conditions.

How is food poisoning treated?

There is no vaccine or medication to cure food poisoning. Treatment is based on relieving symptoms. People with diarrhea and vomiting should drink lots of fluids to keep from getting dehydrated.

How is food poisoning prevented?

Usually, food poisoning can be prevented by closely following the guidelines below:
- Wash hands with soap and water after using the restroom, after touching animals, after swimming, before, during, and after food preparation, and after handling raw meats.
- Clean food preparation work surfaces, equipment, and utensils with soap and water before, during, and after food preparation.
- Keep food at safe temperatures.
- Do not eat undercooked meat, poultry, or eggs.
- Do not eat foods past the expiration date.
- Do not eat unpasteurized dairy products.
- Wash all produce before eating raw or cooking.
- Separate raw and cooked food.
- Use treated water for washing, cooking, and drinking.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: http://www.cdc.gov/features/befoodsafe/

Food and Drug Administration, Food Facts for Consumers: http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm077286.htm

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